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ABSTRACT

The revised General Educational Development (GED) tests introduced in 1988 require higher-level analytical skills of examinees than previous tests. The most immediate revision is the writing skills test, which requires examinees to demonstrate writing ability. This guide provides the GED student with a plan for writing an essay that will receive a passing grade. Certain assumptions inform this guide: (1) this plan is designed for GED students functioning above the eighth-grade level; (2) not all GED students require the writing instruction described in this guide; (3) students may not need to use all sections in this guide; (4) the instructor must develop sets of topics as supplements; (5) students should not have to research the topic to write; (6) students have no choice in writing exercises; and (7) instructors should predicate all instruction on a recognition that students have knowledge about the topic. The guide's 10 chapters deal with the following questions: (1) what are they asking me?; (2) what can I say about this topic?; (3) how can I sort my ideas?; (4) how can I organize my groups of ideas?; (5) how should my essay look?; (6) how should I write the introduction; (7) how should I write the body?; (8) how should I write the conclusion?; (9) how can I polish my essay?; and (10) how will my essay be scored? Teaching tips for the instructor precede each student chapter. A copy of the holistic scoring guide is included in the student section of chapter 10. (NLA)

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WRITING THE GED ESSAY

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

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ADULT EDUCATION 310 PROJECT

MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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PASCAGOULA SCHOOL DISTRICT

PASCAGOULA, MISSISSIPPI

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PREFACE

The revised GED tests to be introduced in 1988 will require higher level analytical skills of examinees than previous tests. Specifically, according to The 1988 Tests of General Educational Development: A Preview (1985, The GED Testing Service of the American Council on Education, p. 7; hereafter referred to as GED Preview), the 1988 tests will:

demand more highly developed levels of critical thinking and problem solving;

reflect the many roles of the individual (e.g., worker, family member, consumer, and citizen of the country and of the world);

acknowledge the sources of change affecting individuals and society (e.g., rapid introduction of computers, pervasive impact of television, shifting political priorities, and new opportunities afforded by scientific advances);

and contain settings that adult examinees will recognize as relevant to daily life

The most immediately obvious revision--and the one causing the most anxiety for instructors--is the Writing Skills Test which will consist of two parts. Part II will require the examinee to demonstrate writing ability. The GED Preview indicates that examinees will be asked "to compose an expository writing sample, generally of the type requiring the writer to take a position and defend it with appropriate evidence, detail, and argumental strategies." According to the description of the test content, examinees "will be provided with a single topic which asks them

to present an opinion or explanation regarding a situation about which adults would be expected to have some general knowledge." Examinees will be given 45 minutes to write their essays of "about 200 words" which will be scored holistically (that is, on overall effectiveness) by trained readers (p. 15; all emphases mine).

Each topic will be presented in the form of a prompt. The following prompt, used with a national sample of high school seniors, has been published in The Preview as an example of the way a topic will be presented in the Writing Skills Test:

The automobile has certainly been responsible for many changes in the United States. Some of these changes have improved our lives and some have made life more difficult or unpleasant.

Write a composition of about 200 words describing the effect of the automobile on modern life. You may describe the positive effects, the negative effects, or both. Be specific, and use examples to support your view.

The prompt is accompanied by specific instructions encouraging the examinee to read the topic carefully and to plan carefully before writing.

This brief synopsis of Part II of The Writing Skills Test makes clear one of the GED examinee's tasks--to write an "effective" essay--and, by implication, one of the GED instructional tasks--to teach students to write "effectively." How can we do that?

Many problems are evident. Ideally, our GED students began creative and expository writing in the first grade and continued writing "across the curriculum" as long as they remained in a formal school program. We know better. If they wrote at all, it was sporadically in English class during the grading period devoted to composition. Writing is thus something they did in English class. Even then, they probably received only a letter grade for their efforts with little accompanying explanation

and follow-up instruction. The experience may well have left a bad taste and reinforced an inherent belief that they cannot write. We cannot therefore assume a background of writing practice or even a desire to write.

Neither can we assume that our students are readers. For many of them, reading is what they had to do for an hour a day in elementary school. For some, the memory is unpleasant. Not all will have developed the habit of reading for information; fewer still will read for pleasure. Consequently, they will lack the extensive reading background so integrally related to writing well.

Finally, our GED students will be in a hurry. They need a job or want to enter a training program for which the GED is a prerequisite. They need their GED certificate tomorrow. Their goals may be unrealistic, but so are ours if we think we can retain them long enough for a full developmental writing program.

As a result, we will have to give our students the most efficient writing instruction we can devise. By efficient I mean instruction which produces the desired result (preparing the student to write the GED essay) in the shortest amount of time. Accordingly, the plan I suggest in this guide does not cover all the niceties of writing. It does not have as its aim turning every GED student into a polished, graceful, discriminating writer. Conversely, its aim is to provide the GED student with a plan—a formula—for writing an essay which will receive a passing grade. I do not apologize for not aiming higher: The student's goal is to pass the GED exam, and one of the basic premises of adult education is that the instructional role is to facilitate learners' reaching their goals.

Certain assumptions inform this guide:

1. The suggested plan is designed for GED students, those functioning above the eighth-grade level. While certain parts may be used with students functioning at a lower level, the plan in its entirety or used exclusively is inappropriate for the ABE student. Preliminary and supplemental material is a necessity for the ABE student.
2. Not all GED students will require the writing instruction described in this guide. While I have referred and will continue to refer to the "typical GED student," any writing instructor may discover students who possess the requisite skills for the GED essay. While refraining from helping these students to improve further may be difficult, the better course is to recognize and acknowledge that these students do not need us to pass the GED.
3. Concomitantly, not all the GED students who do need writing instruction and practice will need the "whole load." The instructor will use only those chapters appropriate to the individual student's needs.
4. The instructor will obtain and become thoroughly familiar with The Preview which not only provides information on all five of the revised tests but also covers extensively the essay requirements, contains sample essays, explains the concepts of holistic scoring, and provides an explanation of the rating (score) given each of the sample essays.
5. The writing instructor will develop sets of topics, complete with prompts, to supplement the writing exercises in this guide. Topics provided here simply illustrate the suggested writing plan. Many GED students will need considerably more practice.
6. Any topic presented to the student for writing practice will, to the extent the instructor can devise, be a subject on which the student can reasonably be expected to have general knowledge. Students

should not have to research the topic to write. If topic prompts are difficult to construct, The Cambridge Program for the New York State GED Writing Sample (Cambridge, 1986) and GED Writing Sample (Steck-Vaughn, 1987), among the currently available commercial materials, offer some excellent topics.

7. For a given writing exercise, the student will not be given a choice of topics since he/she will have no choice on the GED examination.
8. The instructor will predicate all instruction on a recognition that students have knowledge about the topic. The aim is therefore not to help the student find something to write about a given topic but to help him/her present his/her own ideas in the most effective and logical manner.

Comments about the format of this guide may be helpful. The white pages are student pages. They are not numbered so that the instructor can supplement and reproduce each chapter as desired without having to amend pagination. The white pages address the student directly.

The pastel pages, which precede each chapter, are designed for the instructor and contain teacher tips and caveats.

A copy of the holistic scoring guide is included in the student section of Chapter X. In reference to the scoring guide, I reiterate that it should be used in conjunction with the entire GED Preview from which it is excerpted. The scoring guide cannot be internalized unless it is used in concert with the sample essays and the rating (score) earned by each.

Instructors should note that the student pages treat only one method of addressing a topic—taking a side and defending it. Each of the sample

prompts released to date provides this option which is an easier (and more efficient) method of writing about a topic than addressing both sides of the issue. Some suggestions are offered in the teacher's pages preceding each student chapter for those instructors who wish to provide practice in both methods, but the focus throughout is the defense of one point of view.

One more preliminary point must be considered—the standards for the GED essay. The essay will be scored on a scale of one to six according to its overall effectiveness. The holistic scoring guide makes the term effective less subjective than is normally the case. Each of the six scores has specific descriptors which address the degree to which the writer has achieved each of the following:

The writer has understood the topic and has written to the topic as a whole or to a particular phase of the topic.

The writer makes a clear point or series of points.

The writer has control of the structure.

The writer offers adequate and specific support for his/her point(s).

The writer uses standard English

The scale descriptor which most closely describes how well the writer has done in each of these areas dictates the score to be given the essay. It follows that the descriptors, not personal standards for writing, should serve as guides in teaching GED students to write essays. Personal

predilection to the contrary, a misplaced comma or a poor word choice is not fatal. The essay may still be effective and earn a high score. Perfection is not the goal.

INTRODUCTION

The GED Writing Skills Test requires you to write an essay of about 200 words explaining your opinion on an assigned topic. You will be given 45 minutes to plan and write your essay which will be scored by trained readers who will use a scoring guide provided by the GED Testing Service. You will not know your topic ahead of time, and you will not have a choice of topics.

This description of what you must do can seem frightening at first. However, the following facts should help you feel more comfortable about writing an essay:

1. The GED Testing Service, which will assign the topics, will use only those topics about which everyone will have some knowledge. You do not have to worry about getting a topic you have never heard about. You will know something about the subject.
2. An essay is the written expression of your opinion. The essay may blend fact with imagination, knowledge with feeling, but its purpose is always the same: to express an opinion.

You have opinions. You may not especially like the idea of explaining your opinion in writing, but you probably do not mind talking to someone and expressing your thoughts. Your opinions and ideas are important to you.

3. Passing the GED essay does not mean that you have to write a perfect essay or even an outstanding one. It does require that you state your opinion clearly, give the reasons for the way you feel, and use generally correct English. You can make some mistakes and still pass.
4. You can develop a plan which will help you write the GED essay. The following chapters explain the steps in that plan and provide practice for you.

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CHAPTER I

WHAT ARE THEY ASKING ME?

1. Begin this exercise as a group activity so no one is forced to answer. Individual confidence will be developed when each person realizes he/she knew that "answer" too.
2. Move to individual work, using the two topics on the student pages plus those you supply.
3. While the student's ability to understand the basic thrust of the topic prompt is critical, do not overkill. In writing, as in all phases of GED instruction, students will progress at varying rates. Do not force students into a holding pattern. Let them move ahead.
4. Although you will want to ensure that each student can state the basic question, allow some latitude in wording. Forcing the student to accept your phrasing of the question is counterproductive.

VARIATIONS

My writing plan is to train the student to take a position on a topic and defend it. You may wish to have students address both sides of a question. Regardless, the first step is synonymous — training the student to discover the basic question stated or implied in the prompt.

WHAT ARE THEY ASKING ME?

While you are practicing your writing skills and when you take the GED examination, you will be given topics that can seem a little overwhelming because of their length. The purpose of giving you all that information is to help you, to give you assistance in writing about the topic. Despite the length, the topic will suggest a basic question which you will answer (or respond to) in your essay. Your first step in writing is to understand **exactly** what is being asked in the topic. Read it. Read it again. Ask yourself, "What are they asking me?" Write that basic question down

For instance, look at the following topic which the GED Testing Service has used as a sample:

The automobile has certainly been responsible for many changes in the United States. Some of these changes have improved our lives and some have made life more difficult or unpleasant.

Write a composition of about 200 words describing the effect of the automobile on modern life. You may describe the positive effects, the negative effects, or both. Be specific, and use examples to support your view.

Read the topic.

Read it again.

Ask yourself, "What are they asking me?"

You may decide that the question is **What are the good (positive) effects of the automobile on modern life?**

You have discovered one of the underlying questions, but you have not discovered the main, or basic, question.

You may decide the question is **What are the bad (negative) effects of the automobile on modern life?**

Again, you have found an underlying question, but you have not found the basic question.

However, if you combine the two questions, you will have discovered the basic question: **What are the effects of the automobile on modern life?**

Look again at the topic. The basic question is suggested in the instruction to "write an essay of about 200 words describing the effect of the automobile on modern life."

This basic question is the one you must answer (or respond to) in your essay. Always look for that basic question as a starting point with any topic. Write it down in the form of a question.

At this point, do not worry about what you will say in your essay or the approach you will take in answering the question. Just find the basic question. Being precise in this step will prevent confusion later.

Now, find the basic question in these two topics. Remember to read, reread, find the basic question, and write it down in question form.

TOPIC # 1

Many people claim that women who work full time deprive their children of a warm, loving home. They say that children are left in the care of strangers from the time that they are a few weeks old. Others point out that children of working mothers are more independent from an early age and grow up to be more responsible adults.

Write an essay of about 200 words explaining the effect of a mother's full-time work on her children.

The basic question: _____
_____ ?

TOPIC # 2

In many states today, a student must pass a competency test to graduate from high school. Those who favor the test say that it ensures that anyone who graduates from high school can read and write and do basic mathematics. Opponents of the test claim that it cannot measure a student's abilities, achievements, or potential. They also say that the test is unfair to some students.

Write an essay of about 200 words explaining whether you think a student should have to pass a competency test to graduate from high school.

The basic question: _____
_____ ?

REMEMBER

1. The starting point in writing your essay is to decide **exactly** what the topic is.
2. Read the topic.
3. Read it again.
4. Ask yourself, "What are they asking me?"
5. Write the basic question down in the form of a question.
6. Do not worry about what you will say in your essay in answering the question. At this point, **just find the question.**

CHAPTER II

WHAT CAN I SAY ABOUT THIS TOPIC?

1. Begin this exercise as a group activity also. Assign a topic with a prompt similar to the type to be used on the GED examination. Make sure the students understand the topic by reviewing as necessary the steps in Chapter I. then have the group generate ideas related to the subject and record ideas on the chalkboard as they are offered.
2. Continue the group generation of ideas on topics you have assigned, expanding the number of topics on the student pages, until the group seems comfortable with the process and understands that its ideas are acceptable and "good enough" for an essay.
3. Move to individual work, having each student generate ideas on topics which you assign.
4. Accept each idea offered by students in both group and individual work. Because students often feel they will not be able to think of anything to write, this step is critical to reassure them that their thoughts are valuable and that they are knowledgeable about the subject. Write down every idea generated, and be careful not to reveal through words or body language that you think the idea is unrelated to or inappropriate for the topic.

5. Resist the urge to talk about the entire essay at this point or to eliminate ideas. While some ideas may have to be eliminated in other steps of the essay-writing process, neither you nor the student knows now the direction the essay will take. To question any of the ideas or to comment on them may reinforce a student's fear of writing.
6. Resist, too, correcting a student's grammar or word choices when he/she offers an idea. If the student's wording is particularly barbarous, you may — without comment — simply record it in more correct form.
7. Remember that your goal in this step is to build student confidence in his/her ability to "say something" about the assigned topic.

VARIATIONS

Once again, regardless of the model(s) you teach your students, this step is synonymous among models.

WHAT CAN I SAY ABOUT THIS TOPIC?

You now have an assigned topic which is in the same form as the one you will have on your GEd examination. You have thought about the topic, rephrased it in your own words, made sure you understand it, and put it in the form of a question to be answered.

Given a choice, you may not have chosen this topic. You may feel that you do not know much about the subject. However, you must write about it. What can you do?

You begin by jotting down every idea you can think of which relates to the basic question you have discovered in the topic. Don't judge the ideas which come to mind. Don't reject any ideas because you think they are not good or that they may not fit into the essay. Don't even think about writing the essay at this point. Don't worry about whether you will write in favor of or against the topic. Brainstorm ideas on both sides of the question and write them down in the order in which they occur to you.

For example, suppose you were given this topic:

Many people, including some policemen, representatives, and community groups, feel that handguns should be illegal. Others argue that owning a handgun is the right of every citizen.

Write an essay of about 200 words explaining your view on the question of private citizens owning handguns.

Ask yourself, "What is being asked in this topic?" As you did in Chapter I, turn the topic into one basic question. Perhaps you will have a question similar to this one: Should citizens have the right to own handguns? What comes to mind when you think about this question?

A few ideas that might come to mind have been listed below.

POSSIBLE IDEAS

1. Guns needed for protection
2. Criminals would still get guns
3. Guns dangerous to children
4. Fewer crimes would be committed in anger
5. People not trained in use
6. Basic right

Notice that this list of possible ideas is jumbled, including both positive and negative ideas. No attempt to sort the ideas has been made. They were simply written down as they came to mind. No idea that came to mind was omitted. You should follow the same process when brainstorming.

Now, add your own ideas about owning handguns in the column
labeled YOUR IDEAS

YOUR IDEAS

Suppose you were given this topic:

Currently, the minimum wage is \$3.35 an hour. Some people feel that employers should be allowed to pay less to young or unskilled workers. They say that more employers would be willing to hire and train workers if they were allowed to pay less and that unemployment would drop as a result. Others contend that abolishing the minimum wage would just allow employers to exploit workers.

Write an essay of about 200 words explaining your thoughts on this topic.

What is the basic question suggested in this topic?

The basic question: _____
_____ ?

What thoughts come to mind as you think about this basic question? Jot your ideas below. This time, no ideas are suggested to you.

YOUR IDEAS

Continue the brainstorming process by writing down your ideas on the following topics.

Recently, the news media have revealed the role of the National Security Council in selling arms to Iran and diverting money for aid to the Contras in Nicaragua. Furthermore, reporters have speculated about President Reagan's knowledge of and role in the Iran arms deal. While some have applauded the press for revealing the facts, others have accused reporters of being on a witch hunt and badgering officials.

What do you think the role of the press should be in such matters? Explain your view in an essay of approximately 200 words.

The basic question: _____
_____ 2

In the past few years, we have been made aware that many star athletes graduate from high school and college without having acquired basic reading, language, and mathematics skills. One result of this revelation is that many schools have increased their eligibility requirements for athletes. Some schools require athletes to maintain a C average to participate in athletic events. Those who favor the higher requirements say that the role of the school is to develop students' academic skills and that those who cannot meet requirements should not be allowed to devote time to athletics. Other say that the rule is unfair to those with athletic skills.

In an essay of approximately 200 words, explain your view on eligibility requirements for participation in athletics.

The basic question: _____
_____ ?

YOUR IDEAS

REMEMBER

1. When you are assigned an essay topic, the first step in preparing to write is to make sure that you understand what is being asked. Rephrase the topic in your own words and turn it into one basic question.
2. The next step is to write down all the ideas that come to mind as you think about answering the question.
3. Don't judge any of the ideas as you think of them or reject any. Don't wonder whether they will fit in your essay. Just write down your ideas as they occur to you.

TEACHER TIPS

CHAPTER III

HOW CAN I SORT MY IDEAS?

1. Again, initiate this section with group work and record group suggestions before making individual assignments.
2. Few students will have difficulty sorting ideas into positive and negative groups. Some may have difficulty with subgrouping and will benefit from classification (use the term sorting) exercises such as those found in most secondary grammar texts.
3. Although naming (or labeling) the subgroups may be frustrating to many students, the process is crucial because students are required to specify the relationship among ideas. If they are unable to discover a subgroup name which encompasses all the ideas they have grouped, they will understand the necessity of further subgrouping. By the time they actually begin writing the essay, they will also have gained a clearer understanding of how their ideas can most logically "fit" together. Furthermore, while you may never use the term topic sentence in instructing your students, the subgroup names make fine starting points on which to build paragraphs.
4. I concede that having one idea in a "subgroup" is illogical, but retaining all the ideas the student has generated is important at this point. Students with the skills to produce many ideas related to the essay topic may well eliminate these "single idea subgroups" as

irrelevant as they continue the writing process. Alternately, they may also possess the skill to include this single idea through subordination or some other device in a most appropriate and effective manner.

5. Retaining all the ideas the student has listed is most crucial for the student who simply cannot think of much related to the topic. Later in the writing process, this student will require guidance in expanding those few ideas, but helping the student expand his/her own few ideas is preferable to your supplying the ideas. You will not be there when he/she writes the GED essay. Moreover, if the student cannot think of ideas related to the topic, he/she is unlikely to have much to say about the ideas you supply.

VARIATIONS

Once again, this step remains the same regardless of the method(s) taught.

HOW CAN I SORT MY IDEAS?

So far, you have learned about the type of essay you will be expected to write on the GED examination. By asking yourself questions about the topic, rephrasing it in your own words, and turning it into one basic question, you have had practice in figuring out exactly what the topic is about. You have jotted down your ideas about several topics, and you have discovered that you know quite a bit about a number of subjects. The problem now is that you just have a list without order. How can you sort, or group, these ideas?

The first step is to sort the ideas into positive and negative groups. Take the first topic you used -- citizens' owning handguns. For that topic, you phrased a basic question suggested in the topic: Should citizens have the right to own handguns? Several "possible ideas" were suggested to you. To these suggestions, you added your own ideas. If you sorted the "possible ideas" into positive (in other words, yes, citizens should be allowed to own handguns) and negative (in other words, no, citizens should not be allowed to own handguns) groups, the two lists would look like the following:

POSITIVE

Guns needed for protection .
Basic right

NEGATIVE

Guns dangerous to children
Fewer crimes would be committed
in anger

People not trained in use

One idea--criminals would still get guns--has not been added to either of the groups. Which group it "belongs" to depends upon what the phrase means. You decide what the idea means to you and then add it to the appropriate group.

Now take your own ideas which you added to the "possible ideas" on owning handguns and put them in the appropriate groups on the previous page.

Next, sort your two lists into smaller groups (or subgroups). To do this, decide which ideas are related (or kin to each other). How are they related? What do the ideas have in common?

Once you have sorted all the ideas into smaller groups (subgroups), give each subgroup a name which describes how each of the ideas in the subgroup is related to all the others you have put in that group. In other words, use a subgroup name that indicates how all the ideas in that subgroup are related to each other.

One such subgroup taken from the positive and negative lists could look something like this:

Dangers of gun ownership

People not trained in use

Dangerous to children

Now sort the rest of the ideas in your positive and negative lists into subgroups of related ideas and give a name to each subgroup. Remember to use all your ideas as well as the "possible ideas" which were listed for you. Space for three more subgroups is set up for you below. You may need to develop more subgroups if you have a number of ideas to sort.

_____ (name of subgroup)

_____ (name of subgroup)

_____ (name of subgroup)

As you create the subgroups, new ideas--or even new subgroups--may occur to you. Add these too. Create as many subgroups as necessary to include all your ideas. You may find that some ideas seem to stand alone, that they are not related to any other ideas in your lists. If you do have that situation, list each of these single ideas in a separate subgroup, but give the subgroup a name even though it contains only one idea. Later, you may decide to expand this single-idea subgroup or to eliminate it. For the present time, you should keep it.

PRACTICE

Now, take the second topic, the minimum wage, and sort all the ideas into positive and negative groups.

POSITIVE

NEGATIVE

Next, sort the positive and negative groups into subgroups and give each subgroup a name as you did in the preceding exercise. use all the ideas you listed in the positive and negative groups and remember that you may have some subgroups with only one idea in them. Remember, also, to add new ideas or new subgroups as they occur to you and to give each subgroup a name.

If you feel that you need more practice in grouping and subgrouping, sort your ideas for the other topics you used in Chapter II into positive and negative groups and then into subgroups to which you give a name:

1. The role of the press in investigating officials
2. Eligibility for athletes

REMEMBER

1. After you have listed all your ideas on the essay question, the next step is to create order among the ideas by sorting them into positive and negative groups.
2. The next step is to decide which ideas are related, create subgroups, and name each subgroup.
3. You should keep all of your ideas. Having some subgroups with only one idea in each is acceptable.

TEACHER TIPS

CHAPTER IV

HOW CAN I ORGANIZE MY GROUPS OF IDEAS?

1. Group work is less feasible for this section and subsequent ones. You may be wise to go through one exercise with the students so that they will understand what they are being asked to do but use a topic different from those in the student sections. You should not imply even inadvertently that one approach to a topic is preferable to another or that a certain ranking of subgroups is "correct." For this reason, I do not provide "possible ideas" as I did in the previous chapters. The student should now be working at least semi-independently with his/her own ideas about the assigned topics.
2. This section is important to help the student decide where to start in writing the essay and to assist him/her in sticking to the point throughout the composition.
3. With the typical GED student, ignore the opposing argument, except, perhaps, in the introduction, once he/she has decided on and circled an approach. Forget the other group of ideas which has been generated. Only a few of your students will possess the writing skills and grace to allude to and argue effectively against opposing viewpoints. If they attempt this approach, most will only obscure their intended points and hoist themselves with their own petards.

Those with writing skills to handle such an approach do not need the type of instruction being suggested here.

4. If you have students who rank "single idea subgroups" as most important, ignore the obvious at this point. In a later section, students will begin to use examples to add flesh to their points. Guidance in expanding a point will be more effective in this later chapter. Besides, the student may be right. Expanded, that one idea may be the most important argument he/she has.
5. The implication in this section is that students should not change their minds once they have chosen a point of view and ranked ideas. Encourage this notion, most particularly with the less able writers. Remember that the GED essay will have a time limit. Students will need to be able to make a decision quickly about what they will write and stick to it. Changing their minds repeatedly is a luxury they cannot afford.
6. While planning an essay is critically important to clear writing, do not teach formal outlining. The process suggested in this chapter works equally well for organizing thoughts and eliminates the intricacies of form of the formal outline. A formal outline is a nuisance, composed by most good writers who are required to submit an outline as part of their papers after they have written their papers.

VARIATIONS

If you are teaching other plans of writing the essay, you must now adapt the instructions in the student pages. The student must retain both the

positive and negative groups and determine the relative importance of each subgroup within the two groups.

HOW CAN I ORGANIZE MY GROUPS OF IDEAS?

In the last two chapters, you practiced listing ideas related to your essay question and sorted those ideas into positive and negative groups. Then, you worked on sorting the two groups into subgroups and giving each subgroup a name which described the relationship among the ideas in the subgroup. Now, you need to learn one more organizational step to help you write an essay: deciding on the approach (point of view, side, or focus) you want to take in your writing about the assigned topic. Once you have made that decision, you can decide which of the subgroups will make the strongest points in your essay.

How do you decide which side to write about? You may well have already decided. Find your groups and subgroups on the topic of handguns and keep them in front of you for the rest of this exercise. Is the positive or negative side longer? The longer list most likely indicates your strongest feelings and/or the area in which you are most knowledgeable. This list should become the approach, or focus, of your essay.

If the positive and negative lists are about the same length, you must decide which side you are more comfortable with or feel more strongly about. Ask yourself some questions: Do I believe that citizens have a right to own handguns? Do I feel that a person earns something valuable from the right to own a handgun? If your answer to these questions is yes, you should choose the positive side as the focus of your essay. If your answer is no, you should take the negative side.

Once you have decided on the focus you want to take in your essay, circle all the subgroups that are related to that side. Now, examine those circled subgroups. Which subgroup contains the most important points you can use to support the side you are taking? Label this subgroup # 1. Which group is next in importance? Label it # 2. Continue through your circled subgroups, labeling each one according to its importance.

What you have accomplished when you finish ranking the subgroups is a map (or outline) of your essay. When you begin to write, you will not waste time trying to decide what you should say or which ideas you should use. You have already made these decisions. You know which approach (side, focus) you will take. You have circled it and will stick to it without being tempted to wander back and forth between the two sides. You have also ranked the subgroups and know which points will be most important in your essay.

PRACTICE

Now, locate your groups of ideas on the second essay topic, the minimum wage. Follow the steps described above to decide which side or focus to take in the essay. Circle that list. Now rank the subgroups in the circled list according to their importance.

MORE PRACTICE

If you feel at ease with choosing an approach to an essay and ranking subgroups of ideas, go on to the next chapter. If not, locate your lists of ideas on the other two topics:

1. The role of the press in investigating officials
2. Eligibility requirements for athletes

Choose an approach for each of these and rank the subgroups.

REMEMBER

1. The first step in organizing your ideas about the essay topic is to sort them into positive and negative groups.
2. The next step is to create and name subgroups of related ideas in each group.
3. The third is to decide which side will be the focus of your paper.
4. The final step in organizing your ideas is to decide which of your subgroups contains the most important points you want to make and to label these groups # 1, # 2, # 3, etc.

TEACHER TIPS

CHAPTER V

HOW SHOULD MY ESSAY LOOK?

Note: To prevent copyright and/or reprint difficulties, I have used as samples some of my newspaper columns. Since these have a narrow focus and are written in journalistic style, they should be supplemented. Students should analyze a variety of essays for structure.

1. Concentrate on the structure, or pattern, of an essay. The students need to know what they should do in an essay. They need a plan.
2. Make sure students understand that each rectangle in the structural model represents a paragraph.
3. Use a number of essays of a variety of lengths in group work. Have students analyze them for structure. Emphasize that structure is discernible-- that the writer has a plan.
4. Other than teaching that one sentence rarely makes a paragraph, do not tell students how long a paragraph or essay should be. Teach them instead what they must do in each paragraph or in the essay as a whole. As an aide in analyzing structure, you might have students determine why writers in sample essays have devoted more than one paragraph to a major point.

VARIATIONS

If you are planning to teach alternate essay styles, your sample essays should include a variety of styles for structural analysis.

HOW SHOULD MY ESSAY LOOK?

As a final step before actually beginning to write your essay, you should give some thought to how an essay looks or, in other words, to its form or structure. Just as a skeleton is the frame for your body, the structure of an essay is its frame. Everything you write rests on that structure.

Let's look at the skeleton of a short essay, the type you will write in class and on the GED examination. Each rectangle represents a paragraph.

INTRODUCTION

States the writers opinion;
shows the focus of the essay

BODY

Major Point
(one of your subgroups)

Major Point
(one of your subgroups)

Major Point
(one of your subgroups)

CONCLUSION

Summarizes or "clinches"
the writer's opinion

An essay can, of course, be any length, consisting of only a few or many paragraphs. The introduction and conclusion may consist of one, three, five, ten or more paragraphs. The body may be two paragraphs or dozens of paragraphs. Regardless of the length, you will discover a structure when you analyze the essay. Look at the structure of the following two essays as examples. Neither has five paragraphs, but both have a clear structure.

The first "essay" is actually the body of a letter sent to parents by the public relations department of a local school district. The district had adopted the following eligibility rules for all co-curricular activities: (1) a student must maintain a C average; and (2) a student may not have more than one F during a grading period. These rules were more demanding than those of the state athletic association and of the surrounding school districts. When the rule was announced, some coaches, parents, and students disagreed. After the first grading period, when a number of students, including the school quarterback, were declared ineligible, protest in the community was widespread. While the school refused to change the rules, it did send the following to the parents:

Maintaining a proper balance between the district academic program and co-curricular activities often requires some difficult decisions. Activities, such as band, athletics, and cheerleading, are valuable and important not only to the participant but also to the entire student body and to the community. Yet, our students are here to receive an education. Co-curricular activities should enhance that education, not interfere with it. We therefore offer no apology for making the academic program our priority. To do otherwise is to fail in our responsibility to our students.

A student who maintains less than a C average is performing at a below-average level. That student cannot afford the time required for after-school and evening practice and activities. If we permit that student's participation in extra activities, we devalue the importance of the academic program.

Speaking recently about athletes in general and basketball players in particular, John Wooden, former UCLA basketball coach, said, "If I am a young man's coach, I want him to be making an effort as a student, just as I want him to be making the effort as a player. Perhaps the most important thing we can say to these youngsters at the earliest level of participation is 'the most important thing you can do is not make that touchdown or score that basket but hit those books.' "

By setting and enforcing eligibility requirements for co-curricular activities in our district, we are saying to students, "the most important thing you can do is 'hit those books!'" We seek your support for this policy and encourage you to work with your child's teachers, counselor, and principal if he or she has difficulty maintaining eligibility.

If you analyze the essay, you will find that the four paragraphs have a clear structure.

INTRODUCTION
(Paragraph 1)

States the writers opinion;
the academic program is most
important.

MAJOR POINT
(Paragraph 2)

Major Points: Students making less
than a C average do not have time
for other activities

MAJOR POINT
(Paragraph 3)

Major Points: A well known,
successful coach agrees.

CONCLUSION
(Paragraph 4)

Summarizes: (academics most
important) and asks for parents'
support)

Suggesting that you should always write a five-paragraph essay is therefore foolish. You may do very well with two paragraphs in the body; you may want to use two paragraphs for the introduction; you may need to write a ten-paragraph essay to cover your ideas. The length will depend upon the number of ideas you have about the essay topic.

Your GED essay will not be scored on length. You can develop a very good essay in a few paragraphs. You will, however, be scored on the development of the essay—in other words, on how you structure it.

Follow the pattern, regardless of how many paragraphs you write. After you write, check to see that you have followed the pattern.

The next essay explains a new method of contacting parents when students are absent. This essay has ten paragraphs, but the structure is still obvious.

Local students toying with the notion of skipping a day of school or cutting a few classes may be a little stronger in resisting temptation now that the school's new "tattletale" has been installed.

"Tattletale," or Telecorp 606, is a computerized phone system which calls the homes of absentee students with the prerecorded message, "your son or daughter was absent one or more periods today." It then encourages the parent to contact the school the next day.

The system was implemented May 14. So far, according to the assistant principal, there have been no negative comments from parents.

"We have had some parents call and ask if they had received a prank call," the assistant principal said. "We tell them 'no that was us.' "

The assistant principal explained that in the past trying to contact the parents of absentee students required at least two hours of office staff time daily. Frequently, the staff was unable to reach parents during the day.

Now, one staff member can input the phone numbers of absentee or truant students in approximately fifteen minutes and press a time for the machine to begin the calls during the evening.

The computer makes up to four attempts to contact someone at the student's home. It also provides for staff review the next morning a printout listing, among other information, whether someone answered or that no one was home.

The high school administrative staff indicates that the evening phone calls do not mean that the student is guilty of anything. Many absences are legitimate.

The point of the call is to keep parents informed. Under current policy, more than nine absences per class per semester in secondary schools is considered excessive. Excessive absences can result in a student's losing course credit.

In its short period of operation, the new system has already earned praise from the attendance office staff. "It lightens the work load for the staff," the assistant principal says. "More importantly, we are having less absenteeism and less period-by-period truancy."

INTRODUCTION (Paragraph 1)	States the focus: "Tattletale" will monitor absences.
BODY	
(Paragraph 2)	First main point: How "Tattletale" works
(Paragraph 3)	
(Paragraph 4)	Second main point: Parents' reaction
(Paragraph 5)	
(Paragraph 6)	Third main point: Value to school staff
(Paragraph 7)	
(Paragraph 8)	
(Paragraph 9)	Fourth main point: Reason for using "Tattletale"
CONCLUSION (Paragraph 10)	Summarizes and "clinches" the point: Student absences have been reduced.

REMEMBER:

- (1) Length is not important; structure (or form) is.
- (2) The introduction should clearly state your opinion or focus.
- (3) The body should develop the major points supporting your opinion.
- (4) The conclusion should summarize your major points and opinion.

TEACHER TIPS

CHAPTER VI

HOW SHOULD I WRITE THE INTRODUCTION?

1. I find a 1-3-1 or 1-4-1 structure ample for a short essay and easiest to teach. You may find longer essays preferable and will certainly want to allow students that option.
2. Many writers prefer an opening structure of Δ , the opposite of what I use. I find that students comprehend ∇ more easily because the opening paragraph "points" to the rest of the essay. In teaching the short essay, a good structural mnemonic is: get into the subject and get to the point (introduction) so that you can get on with the explanation (body) and get out (conclusion).
3. Give ample time to instruction on and practice in writing introductory paragraphs. The students who learn to write good opening paragraphs have conquered the most difficult part of essay writing: they have defined where they will go in the rest of the essay. Have lists of topics (complete with prompts) prepared so that you can give students opportunities for practice. Make sure the students follow all steps in previous chapters before they try to write the introductory paragraph.
4. Understanding the structure of the introduction is usually not a problem for the student; deciding just what kind of opening sentences

- to write is. One rule of thumb is to remember that the opening sentences will relate to the thesis but will not take a position on it.
5. One of the most common errors of unskilled writers is to attempt a very clever opening. The results are almost invariably bad. Help students to understand that their goal is clarity, logic, and reasonableness, not cleverness.
 6. The need to rewrite the introduction after completing the body is common. Writing the body often opens up new ideas that must be incorporated into the introduction, but most writers find they simply cannot get into the body of their essays until they have drafted an introduction. The best policy is to get something on paper, some general statement leading to the thesis, and then to revise later as necessary.
 7. The sample essay on the military and the GED is deliberately unsophisticated. Don't overwhelm students with "perfect" essays. Give samples from which the student can infer, "I can do that too."
 8. Point out that the response to the military/GED question is only one writer's opinion.
 9. Note that the sample essay uses a one-paragraph introduction. This is the plan I teach, but I am not rigid about the plan. If students have good cause, let them adapt the plan.

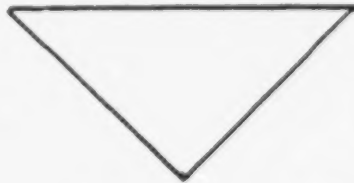
VARIATIONS

Again, adapt the approach if you are teaching other essay styles.

HOW SHOULD I WRITE THE INTRODUCTION?

Now that you have organized your ideas about your essay topic and are familiar with the structure of an essay, you are ready to write the first, or introductory, paragraph. This paragraph will be different from all others in the essay. Its purpose is to introduce the subject and come to a point. That point, which is called a thesis or thesis sentence, is your opinion on the subject and a brief statement of the reasons for your opinion.

You remember that in the pattern of the essay structure used in the last section, a rectangle represented the introductory paragraph. If we represent what the introductory paragraph actually does in an essay, we would use a triangle rather than a rectangle:



The paragraph opens with two or three sentences related to the subject and narrows to a point, the thesis, (your opinion and the major reasons for your opinion). Structurally, this introduction points to the body of the essay.

To start, write the thesis first. Where do you get the thesis? You have already decided that. Remember you decided early in your sorting of ideas on a given topic which side you would take. Suppose you had been given this topic:

Recently, the military services have been reluctant to recruit people with GED certificates. Studies conducted by the Pentagon indicate that those with GED's are less likely to complete their enlistments than high school graduates. Many adult educators, on the other hand, argue that GED graduates are more likely to complete their enlistment periods. They say GED graduates have a definite purpose when they study for the test, and that they pursue their purposes in spite of difficulties.

Do you feel the military view is correct? Write an essay of about 200 words expressing your viewpoint.

Suppose, further, that you had followed all the steps in preparing to write and had developed the following:

Step I: the basic question: Should the military recruit GED graduates?

Step II: Ideas on the topic

GED students have made the effort to return to school
School dropouts are quitters
GED students have a reason for studying
Students drop out of school for many reasons
People who drop out of school do not like authority
GED students study even though they have difficulties
GED students have decided to do something with their lives
School dropouts do not care
GED skills are equal to those of a high school graduate
GED students have made a decision for themselves

Step III: Sorting ideas

POSITIVE

GED students have made the effort to return to school

Students drop out of school for many reasons

GED students have a reason for studying

GED students study in spite of difficulties

GED students have decided to do something with their lives

GED skills are equal to those of high school graduates

NEGATIVE

School dropouts are quitters

People who drop out of school do not like authority

School dropouts do not care

GED students have made a decision for themselves

Step III B: Subgrouping

Step IV: Organizing and Ranking

#2

Why GED students study

1. Decided to something with their lives
2. Have a reason for studying
3. Decision made for themselves

Reason GED students should not be taken into the military

1. They are quitters
2. They do not like authority
3. They do not care

#1

Reasons GED students deserve credit

1. They have made the effort to return to school
2. They study in spite of difficulties
3. Skills are equal to high school graduate

#3

Why GED students dropped out of school

1. Many reasons

Now you can write the thesis sentence. The circled subgroup indicates the focus or opinion. The starting point is simple: It is the writer's opinion--I think the military should recruit GED graduates.

Why do you feel this way? You decided that earlier too when you subgrouped ideas, named the subgroups and ranked them. Take the circled subgroups and use the names of the subgroups or a form of the names to complete the thesis sentence. End the sentence with the name (or form of it) of the highest ranked subgroup:

I think the military should recruit persons who have a GED certificate because there are many reasons they dropped out of school, they went back to school, and they deserve credit for their efforts.

You now have a thesis sentence which meets all the requirements: it states the point of the essay (your opinion) and gives the reasons for your opinion. Note that the weakest subgroup (#3) is given first in the list of reasons and the most important (#1) is given last.

Although the thesis sentence meets all the requirements (gives your opinion and the reasons for your opinion), it is not a strong sentence. It is wordy, and it gives equal weight to all the reasons. You might improve it this way:

I think the military should recruit GED graduates because these people, who were once dropouts, have returned to their studies, often under difficult conditions, and deserve credit for their efforts.

The thesis sentence now indicates that students' dropping out of school is not nearly as important as the fact that they have returned to studies in spite of difficulties. Still, the sentence is too long.

How else could it be written?

Although GED graduates were once dropouts, I think the military should give credit to these graduates who decided to return to their studies, often under difficult conditions.

This sentence is shorter, and it gives different weight to the reasons for the writer's opinion. However, the order and wording have been changed. Does it still retain the writer's opinion and the reasons for that opinion? The opinion is clearly stated, but where are the subgroup names?

<u>Subgroup Title</u>	<u>Wording in thesis</u>
#3 Why GED students dropped out of school	Although GED graduates were once dropouts
#2 Why GED students study	decided to return to their studies
#1 Reasons GED students deserve credit	the military should give credit

The subgroup titles are still in the thesis but they appear in more subtle and sophisticated form.

In how many other ways could you write the thesis? Write your samples below:

Now look at each of your sentences. Is your opinion clear in each? Can you find reference to each subtopic title in each sentence?

Once you have written a thesis which you find acceptable, you still have to write two or three sentences to open the paragraph and lead to the thesis. You can get ideas for the opening from several places. If you have a number of subtopics, you might make use of some of the subtopics other than the three or four most important ones you have decided to develop in the essay. You might use some of the topics from the opposing viewpoint (the ones you did not circle), or you might use some ideas or wording from the prompt itself.

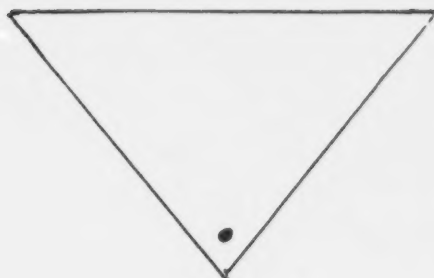
Use these clues for the introductory paragraph:

- (1) Write one or two sentences related to the topic, but do not give your opinion.
- (2) Then use the thesis sentence you have already developed, changing it slightly to "fit" the opening sentences.

Sample

Today, the military is reluctant to accept recruits with GED certificates because it considers these people quitters. This view should be reconsidered. Although some GED recipients were once dropouts, they deserve credit for returning to their studies, often under difficult conditions.

Note that the wording of the thesis (the last sentence) has been changed slightly from those developed earlier but that it gives the writer's opinion and the reasons for it. Also, note the structure:



General,
opening sentences
which relate to the topic

The thesis which "points" to the body

Additional Sample

The military considers GED recipients quitters and will not recruit them. This attitude deprives the military of valuable recruits. Actually, the military should give credit to former dropouts who have decided to return to their studies, often under difficult conditions.

Again, the wording of the thesis has been changed slightly. Does the introductory paragraph still meet the requirements?

1. What is the writer's opinion?
2. Are the subtopic titles mentioned? What are the words and phrases that indicate the subtopics?

#1

#2

#3

3. Is the structure of the introductory paragraph acceptable? Does it "point" to the body?

What are some other ways of writing the introductory paragraph?
Write at least two more versions below.

Now that you have followed the process used by another person in writing an introductory paragraph and have written your own versions of that paragraph, it is time for you to write an introductory paragraph of your own. Again, locate your lists on the first topic, handguns, and follow all the required steps to write an introductory paragraph.

Write opening paragraphs on at least two of the other three topics:

Remember to follow the steps.

1.

2.

Remember

1. The opening paragraph introduces the subject and narrows to the thesis.
2. The thesis is a statement of your opinion (in the most polished form you can write) and the three or four most important reasons for your opinion.
3. The ideas for two or three sentences which lead to the thesis can come from many places, including some of your less important subgroups, some of the opposing groups, or the prompt.

CHAPTER VII

HOW SHOULD I WRITE THE BODY?

1. Again, I use three or four paragraphs as models for the body. Beginning writers need the reassurance of a plan for writing. Do not, however, be too rigid about the length of the essay body. The number of paragraphs depends entirely upon how many points (as expressed or implied in the thesis) the writer wants to cover and how thoroughly he/she covers them. For more experienced writers, many influences come into play as they write--the need for fuller explanation, more examples, additional points, for instance. Nonetheless, even these writers begin with a plan, revising (including the thesis, of course) as they progress. About the only rule one can follow is: Present the reasons to support the opinion as logically, clearly, completely, and persuasively as possible.
2. The writing process I suggest is by now becoming quite lengthy. After students gain some experience in writing, they will, of course, go through the majority of the steps mentally. In the meantime, inexperienced, fearful writers need to learn a process on which they can rely.
3. Many students will want to retain all the ideas they have brainstormed for their essays. It's good that they have so many but guide them in choosing so they can write more than a list in their essays. Even those students who are willing to relinquish

an idea or two may need considerable practice in determining and eliminating irrelevant ideas. To assist them, choose from a variety of exercises available in most secondary grammar texts or in GED instructional materials.

4. Many may also need practice in making their ideas concrete. Most may be more comfortable with generalities and have difficulty generating the specifics to substantiate the general statements. Provide ample practice.
5. This is the section in which you deal with those "single idea subgroups"--if the student still retains them. You can hope that students will have eliminated this type of 'subgroup' by now or that they will have expanded the idea sufficiently with examples, but you cannot count on their obliging you. You will have to provide the guidance.
6. In guiding students in this section, "correct" only in terms of the process. Leave the mechanics and usage alone. Presumably, you will be aware of students' weaknesses in these areas and will be providing appropriate instruction at other times in your GED classes. Do not try to teach everything while you are trying to teach the process.
7. Obviously, most of the student writing is by now individual work, and the teacher must use a great deal of ingenuity in guiding students with varying skills (and attitudes) who will attack an assigned topic in a variety of ways. Help students develop their own ideas in the best way they can, but do not supply ideas or wording and do not imply there is a "best way" to write the essay.
8. Do not require students who are comfortable with writing to follow

this process verbatim. They have already developed a personal process. Use only the sections of the process applicable to the weaknesses you detect. I reiterate an earlier point: The process I suggest is appropriate for inexperienced and/or fearful writers who need a plan on which to rely.

HOW SHOULD I WRITE THE BODY?

Structurally, the body of the essay is the big section. It is also the most powerful. It gives the explanations which convince the reader of the soundness of your opinion (which, you remember, you expressed in the thesis sentence). The power of this section depends upon many things--vocabulary, imagination, originality, skill in working with language--but the most important power element is logical development. In other words, the power depends to a great extent on the structure.

To develop the body of the essay logically, you must:

1. Use the thesis as a guide.
2. Devote at least one paragraph to every reason given in your thesis statement as support for your opinion.
3. Save your strongest reason for last.

How can you follow this plan? Look at this version of the introductory paragraph used in the previous chapter and then look at the questions concerning it.

The military considers GED graduates quitters and will not recruit them. This attitude deprives the military of valuable recruits. Actually, the military should give credit to former dropouts who have decided to return to their studies, often under difficult conditions.

1. What is the thesis sentence?

Actually, the military should give credit to former dropouts who have decided to return to their studies, often under difficult conditions.

2. In simple terms, what opinion does the writer express?

The military should recruit GED graduates.

3. What reasons does the writer give in support of his/her opinion?

They are former dropouts.

They have decided to return to their studies.

They deserve credit for the GED.

4. Which of the reasons does the writer consider most important?

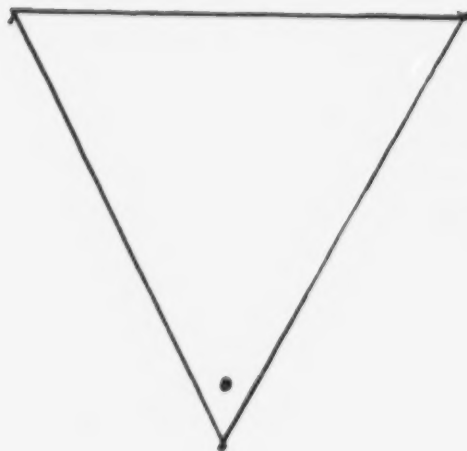
(Remember you ranked these in the organization step, and the most important reason is always listed last.)

They deserve credit for the GED.

5. At least how many paragraphs must the writer have in the body of the essay?

Three: at least one on former dropouts; at least one on decision to return to school; at least one on credit due.

6. Structurally, how will an essay using the introductory paragraph look?



Main point: former dropouts

Main point: decision to return to studies

Main point: credit due GED graduates

Actually, the military should give credit. . . .

Now use the introductory paragraphs your teacher gives you and answer the six questions above about each of them.

By this point, it should be clear to you why the introductory paragraph, especially the thesis sentence, must be so carefully written: it gives you a plan for the rest of the essay. Once you have a plan, all you need to do to get ready to write the paragraphs of the body is to "flesh out" the reasons (the ones listed in the thesis) for your opinion. Much of this "flesh" is in the subtopics you grouped earlier. The rest will come from specific examples and instances you use to illustrate your reasons and make your meaning clear to your reader.

The writer of the essay on the military and the GED might have started his/her essay by composing the following:

The military considers GED graduates quitters and will not recruit them. This attitude deprives the military of valuable recruits. Actually, the military should give credit to former dropouts who have decided to return to their studies, often under difficult conditions.

The writer then went to the topic he/she rated least important: reasons students dropped out.

GED graduates did drop out of school once. They had a lot of reasons. Not all those reasons were negative.

The writer then moved to the next most important topic: reasons for returning to school.

Now these students are older, and they have made a decision for themselves to finish their high school study. They have a reason for returning to school. They want to do something with their lives.

Finally, the writer composed the paragraph dealing with his/her most important idea: GED graduates deserve credit.

These returning adult students deserve credit just for returning to school. Attending class may have been difficult for them. Yet, they continued to attend. When they completed their work and passed the GED, they gained the equivalent of a high school diploma.

The writer of the three paragraphs above has addressed each of the reasons given in the thesis for his/her opinion. However, the paragraphs are weak. They are little more than a listing of the ideas from the subgroups. There are no examples to explain the writer's meaning. The ideas form the skeleton of the writer's argument, but the skeleton needs flesh.

What does the writer mean, for instance, by "a lot of reasons for dropping out"? What is the meaning of "not all those reasons were negative"? What are some of the difficulties faced by GED students?

By adding examples and explanation, the writer could make the body of the essay stronger:

GED graduates did drop out of school once. Their reasons were as different as the people themselves. Some may have had financial difficulties. Others may have had problems with their parents. In fact, their parents may have encouraged them to drop out and help at home. Pregnancy may have caused some students to quit attending school. No one should assume that all people who drop out of school lack intelligence or that they do not care about getting an education.

Those who have returned to school are no longer dropouts. They have made a conscious decision to return to school to get a GED. They realize that the GED certificate is a key to a job, to a promotion, or to advanced training or education. The GED is the first goal in the plan they have developed.

Those who follow the plan and receive the GED deserve credit. They frequently have to overcome difficulties. They may have to study for months to develop the necessary skills to pass the GED. During that period of study, they may be working long hours at their jobs. They may also have to arrange for child care or deal with a spouse who resents their returning to school. Yet, they continue until they receive their GED certificate which, by definition, is the equivalent of a high school diploma. They are graduates too.

The specific examples the writer has now added make the essay stronger. They give weight to the writer's argument. They are the flesh on the skeleton.

Now, you can practice writing the body of an essay for yourself. Locate all of your work on the topic of handguns so that you can go through the steps necessary to write the body of an essay on the subject.

1. What is the first reason in your thesis (the least important in your rankings) that you need to develop into a paragraph?
-

- a. Look at the subgroup this reason "names." What ideas in that group will help you make your point clear to the reader? List them below. Remember that you do not have to use every idea in the subgroup. Pick the two or three that will help you make the strongest paragraph to support your opinion.

- b. Look at each of the ideas listed above for the paragraph. Beside each one, list at least one specific example that will help make your meaning or point clear to the reader. If you think of more than one example for each idea, by all means list all of them.

c. Review your list of ideas and their related examples. Do you want to try to use all of them in the paragraph? You may want to use only one idea which is rich in examples. You may want to use two or more to develop your paragraph. Once you have decided which ideas you want to use, cross out those you will not use.

d. Using the ideas (and related examples) you have kept, write your first paragraph of the body below.

Use the process you just followed for the first paragraph to write the second and following paragraphs of the body of your essay on handguns. Remember that the last paragraph of the body will be devoted to your most important idea.

SECOND PARAGRAPH

THIRD PARAGRAPH

2

Now choose two of the other topics on which you have worked and locate all your notes on those topics. Then, write an essay body for each of those topics. Remember that the body of each essay must develop the thesis with at least one paragraph devoted to each of the reasons for your opinion. Review each thesis carefully before you write. Remember, too, that your most important (highest ranked) reason (subtopic) should be the last paragraph of the body of each of your essays.

ESSAY TOPIC _____

BODY

ESSAY TOPIC _____

BODY

TEACHER TIPS

CHAPTER VIII

HOW SHOULD I WRITE THE CONCLUSION?

Students who have mastered the steps to this point will require little instruction. The key is for them to reiterate their opinion but to use phrasing different from that used in the thesis.

Some students may need encouragement to be brief in the conclusion. They need to learn to "clinch" their point without rehashing the entire argument.

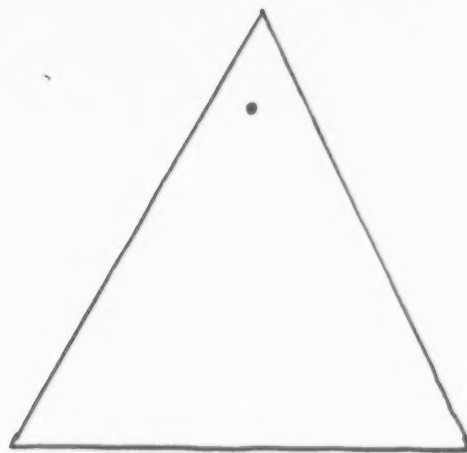
REMEMBER

1. The body of the essay is the main section. It convinces the reader of the soundness of your opinion; therefore, it should be developed clearly and logically.
2. The thesis is the guide for developing the body of the essay.
3. At least one paragraph should be written on each reason given in the thesis to support your opinion.
4. The paragraph with the strongest (most important) reason should be the last one in the body of the essay.
5. Ideas to support the reason you are developing in each paragraph come from the subgroup.
6. You do not have to use every item in the subgroup in the paragraph.
7. Your ideas must be "fleshed out" with examples to make your meaning clear to your reader.

1

HOW SHOULD I WRITE THE CONCLUSION?

The conclusion is the easiest part of the essay. All the work is already done. All you need to do is briefly summarize the body and reiterate (restate in different words) your opinion. Structurally, the conclusion looks like this:



Reiteration of your
opinion

Summary of reasons for
your opinion

The reiteration of your opinion flows naturally from your strongest point which is developed in the paragraph immediately before the conclusion.

The writer of the essay on the GED and the military might conclude in this way:

The military should therefore actively seek adults who have received the GED certificate. Their skills are equal to those of high school graduates. Many have overcome a number of problems to build those skills. They are not quitters.

The conclusion (1) reiterates the writer's opinion but uses words slightly different from those used in the thesis and (2) briefly summarizes the strongest points in the writer's argument.

How else could the writer have concluded? Write two other conclusions below.

CONCLUSION VARIATION #1

CONCLUSION VARIATION #2

Now practice your skills on at least two essays on which you have worked. Locate your notes, introduction, and body for two topics. Write a conclusion for each one.

FIRST TOPIC _____

CONCLUSION

SECOND TOPIC _____

REMEMBER

1. The conclusion is the easiest part of the essay to write.
2. The conclusion should reiterate your opinion.
3. The conclusion should summarize the strongest points in your argument.
4. The conclusion should be brief.

TEACHER TIPS

CHAPTER IX

HOW CAN I POLISH MY ESSAY?

1. Those who are attempting to use transition for the first time often think more is better. Guide students in the judicious use of transitional devices. Teach them to have specific reasons for the use of such devices. "It sounded right" or "it read more smoothly" is a good reason. "I thought I should use one of those words" is not.
2. Some students will not understand the basic meaning of transitional words (or, for that matter, of conjunctions). They will use however when the sentence or thought demands furthermore, also, or moreover and they will use and when but is appropriate. For these students, provide some practice, such as sentences they must complete by choosing from a list of transitional words (or conjunctions) a word or phrase which is in most consonance with the meaning of the sentence.
3. Students unaccustomed to using transitional devices will use them self-consciously and mechanically at first. With practice, they will develop a "feel" for them, including understanding of their importance to the unity of the essay.
4. In critiquing a student's writing or helping him/her to evaluate his/her own writing, use the term improve rather than correct, and always

judge the student's writing holistically. Make improvements in terms of the process and of the holistic scoring guide.

5. The assumption behind the mechanics checklist mentioned in the student chapter is that you have worked with the student on grammatical weaknesses throughout all phases of GED instruction and that you have helped him/her develop a mechanics checklist reflecting individual weaknesses.

HOW CAN I POLISH MY ESSAY?

You have now completed the first draft of at least three essays. Most probably you have--at your teacher's direction--written many others. Now, you need to polish those essays.

The first step is to check the structure of your essays. Locate at least two of your complete essays. Cut and paste your worksheets if necessary to make complete essays. Then rate each essay according to the checklist on the following page.

ESSAY STRUCTURE CHECKLIST

1. Have I addressed the topic and responded to the basic question?
2. Have I written an introductory paragraph?
3. Does my introductory paragraph contain one or two preliminary sentences related to the topic?
4. Does my introduction end with a thesis which states my opinion and the major reasons for that opinion?
5. Does the body of my essay devote at least one paragraph to each of the reasons (points) mentioned in my thesis?
6. Is my most important reason (point) the last paragraph in my essay?
7. Have I written a conclusion?
8. Does my conclusion briefly summarize the points of my argument?
9. Do I use examples to make my points clear to the reader?

Use this STRUCTURAL CHECKLIST with the draft of every essay you write. If you find problem areas, insert words or revise to polish your essay.

The second step in polishing your essay is to check its unity and coherence. Look at the following two paragraphs on the meaning of liberty:

The word "liberty" is often interpreted incorrectly. The dictionary gives many exact definitions. It means "freedom from restraint or control." It may be misinterpreted. Many people think liberty means that they may do whatever they like, regardless of the effects. Liberty is not uncontrolled freedom. Real liberty involves thinking of the other person and giving up one's own desires if they will harm another. If it is to be enjoyed by everyone, everyone must give up the idea that liberty means freedom from all restraint or control. Everyone must live by the true meaning, "self-disciplined freedom."

The word "liberty" is often interpreted incorrectly. The dictionary gives many exact definitions of the word. Briefly, it means "freedom from restraint or control." However, such a brief definition leads to misinterpretation. Many people think liberty means that they may do whatever they like, regardless of the effects. In fact, liberty is not uncontrolled freedom. Real liberty involves thinking of the other person too and giving up one's own desires if they will harm another. If it is to be enjoyed by everyone, then everyone must give up the idea that liberty means freedom from all restraint or control. To be truly free, everyone must live by the true meaning of the word, "self-disciplined freedom."

Which paragraph is smoother?

The sentences do not flow into each other in the first paragraph. They do not stick together. The reader gets a "rough" ride as he "bumps" into each sentence. The addition of a few words makes the paragraph read more smoothly.

These additional words (which are underlined) are examples of transitional devices. They "glue" the sentences together, giving them unity and smoothing out the jolts and bumps.

Transitional devices may be words, phrases, or echo thoughts carried from one sentence to another or from one paragraph to another. These

transitional devices unify an essay, "gluing" sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph.

Look at the essay on the following page. The transitional words and phrases are underlined. "Echoes" are indicated by arrows:

During the past year, more than 500 area adults have been enrolled in evening computer courses. This semester, another group has begun learning to cope with computers.

They are a diverse group, including homemakers, executives, secretaries, senior citizens, and teachers. Many have had no direct experience with computers. Others have had experience with only one application--word processing, for instance, or in only setting and want to learn additional uses. Some are considering purchasing a microcomputer for home use.

Among them are a few who feel they simply have no choice about becoming computer literate. On the enrollment form, one student wrote, "you can't escape the things," when asked why she had enrolled. Another indicated that he was "tired of the patient tone" his children took when they talked about computers in his presence.

Many of those confronting a computer for the first time share a certain wariness of the machines they face. Those electronic beasts seem capable not only of magical, fantastic feats but also of intense ill-will toward humans.

The humans are therefore nervous. They manifest their feelings through an unreasonable fear of making mistakes, hesitancy to press keys, and repeated questions about damaging the equipment. When a program does not run the first time, they blame themselves. "What did I do wrong?" is a frequent question. "I didn't mean to make a mistake," they apologize. "Did I hurt the computer?"

The notion that the computer is magic evaporates quickly. In its place comes the irritating awareness that nothing is obvious to the

machine. Told that she had left out a necessary step, one student complained, "That's understood. Do I have to tell this stupid machine every little thing?"

That student is ready to appreciate the results of the instructor's invitation to run "Apology," a teacher-developed program in which the machine's screen is filled with a listing of its capabilities followed by a brief but abject admission that it can do nothing without step-by-step instructions.

That student is also almost ready, the instructor senses, to take charge of the machine, to provide those instructions. Instructor intuition becomes certainty when the student who once would have been distraught when a program did not run is heard to say "Well, okay, computer, we'll try this instead."

One more person has become a part of the computer revolution. The magic once associated with the machine is gone. It now belongs to the human who has begun to harness the machine and make it a useful tool.

Now analyze several of your essays for unity. Would transitional devices make your essays read more smoothly? (Hint: Read your essay aloud. You can hear "breaks" where you need transition.) Insert the required transition.

The final step in polishing your essay is to check for grammatical errors (mechanics). After working with your teacher, you have discovered whether you have problems with spelling, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, pronoun case, etc. Based on this work, list your problem areas below and use the list to remind yourself to check for errors.

MECHANICS CHECKLIST

Now that you have checked several of your essays for structure, unity, and mechanical correctness, write a final draft of at least two of them, incorporating all the transitional devices, structural improvements, and grammatical corrections you have inserted.

FINAL DRAFT #1

FINAL DRAFT #2

REMEMBER

1. Check the structure of your essay. Make any required improvements.
2. Check the unity of your essay. Use transitional devices to "glue" the parts (sentences, paragraphs) of your essay together. Be judicious in the use of transitional devices. Remember that transitional words and phrases are not like salt to be sprinkled liberally all over your essay. They are to be used carefully when you see the need to make one sentence or paragraph flow smoothly into another.
3. Check the grammatical correctness of your essay.
4. Write the final version of your essay, incorporating all the improvements you have made.

TEACHER TIPS

CHAPTER X

HOW WILL MY ESSAY BE SCORED?

1. Always use the holistic scoring guide for all ratings of student writing.
2. If you have class members rate each other's essays, proceed carefully. Keep students' feelings in mind. By all means, mask students' names before letting other students rate their essays.

HOW WILL MY ESSAY BE SCORED?

On the GED examination, your essay will be scored on its overall effectiveness (holistically). The standards for each of the six ratings your essay could receive are given on the following page.

Use this scoring guide to rate the final draft of each of your essays. Have your teacher rate your essays too. Perhaps you would also like to have your classmates rate your essays so that you can compare their ratings with those you gave yourself.

Are you satisfied with the rating you received on each of your essays? If not, work with your teacher to see how you can improve them to receive a higher rating.

GED Essay Scoring Guide

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Papers will show *some or all* of the following characteristics.

Upper-half papers make clear a definite purpose, pursued with varying degrees of effectiveness. They also have a structure that shows evidence of some deliberate planning. The writer's control of English usage ranges from fairly reliable at 4 to confident and accomplished at 6.

- 6 Papers scored as a 6 tend to offer sophisticated ideas within an organizational framework that is clear and appropriate for the topic. The supporting statements are particularly effective because of their substance, specificity, or illustrative quality. The writing is vivid and precise, though it may contain an occasional flaw.
- 5 Papers scored as a 5 are clearly organized with effective support for each of the writer's major points. The writing offers substantive ideas, though the paper may lack the flair or grace of a 6 paper. The surface features are consistently under control, despite an occasional lapse in usage.
- 4 Papers scored as a 4 show evidence of the writer's organizational plan. Support, though sufficient, tends to be less extensive or convincing than that found in papers scored as a 5 or 6. The writer generally observes the conventions of accepted English usage. Some errors are usually present, but they are not severe enough to interfere significantly with the writer's main purpose.

Lower-half papers either fail to convey a purpose sufficiently or lack one entirely. Consequently, their structure ranges from rudimentary at 3, to random at 2, to absent at 1. Control of the conventions of English usage tends to follow this same gradient.

- 3 Papers scored as a 3 usually show some evidence of planning or development. However, the organization is often limited to a simple listing or haphazard recitation of ideas about the topic, leaving an impression of insufficiency. The 3 papers often demonstrate repeated weaknesses in accepted English usage and are generally ineffective in accomplishing the writer's purpose.
- 2 Papers scored as a 2 are characterized by a marked lack of development or inadequate support for ideas. The level of thought apparent in the writing is frequently unsophisticated or superficial, often marked by a listing of unsupported generalizations. Instead of suggesting a clear purpose, these papers often present conflicting purposes. Errors in accepted English usage may seriously interfere with the overall effectiveness of these papers.
- 1 Papers scored as a 1 leave the impression that the writer has not only not accomplished a purpose, but has not made any purpose apparent. The dominant feature of these papers is the lack of control. The writer stumbles both in conveying a clear plan for the paper and in expressing ideas according to the conventions of accepted English usage.
- 0 The zero score is reserved for papers which are blank, illegible, or written on a topic other than the one assigned.